

oh no, i think i'm catching feelings by jakepurralta

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Summary:

15 years later. Friends with benefits AU.

Jonathan and Nancy see each other again for the first time in years. A late night alone sparks a kiss, but Nancy tells him that they can't fall for each other. She's been transferred to another state and neither of them want to deal with a broken heart.

But was moving forward as friends with benefits really such a good idea?

oh no, i think i'm catching feelings

Author's Note:

This fic contains sexual scenes, but I cannot write smut for the life of me, so I do not expect it to be explicit enough to be NSFW. Title of the fic is from the song "Sex" by EDEN. Great song.

Beginning

People have said, "they will find their way back to each other."

Never boorishly loud, but Jonathan had picked it up whenever he noticed Joyce and Karen sitting at the kitchen table, their conversation suspiciously softer all of a sudden, their heads moved closer toward each other. Jonathan Byers wasn't an idiot. Or deaf, for that matter.

So when Nancy Wheeler got a job outside of town and moved away, he made a deliberate decision to move on. Despite what she'd said to him a few months earlier.

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"I think..." Her words get caught up in her throat, and for a moment she looks like she's about to choke, but she swallows her fear and continues. "I think I might have developed...feelings for you."

He's glad he's sitting down for this because if he wasn't, his knees probably would have given up on him.

She's still pacing the floor, her fingers nervously fumbling, her facial expression puzzled...to say the least. Like she hasn't completely figured it out herself, but she's still pushing out the words like she can't keep them in any longer.

"Are...are you sure?" Jonathan asks softly. He doesn't know what else to say and frankly, it is something he's curious about. He doesn't consider himself to be the kind of person a girl like Nancy would fall for.

She stops short and looks him dead in the eyes, still wide eyed but looking determined now. "Yes."

He sucks in a breath and drops his eyes to the floor, feeling a little flustered and unsure what to do with this information. He hears her step closer to him until she's close enough for him to swear he can hear her heart beat wildly in her chest.

"Jonathan, I was thinking about this a lot. For a while now, actually. You're like, my best friend now, and you've shown me time and time again that you'd drop everything to make me feel better and I cannot thank you enough for that." She sits down on the coffee table to be on the same level as him and places her hand over his knee, causing him to turn his head and finally look at her again. "I realized that I feel the same way. You are kind, and loving, and selfless, and you make me *feel* loved. And I realized that no one else made me feel this way. No one else but you. And I hope you know that I love you, too."

She watches him as his chest shudders at that, tears brimming his eyes. "Nancy, I-" he starts to speak, but words die on his lips as emotion takes him over. He jerks his head to the side, angrily tries to blink it away.

Nancy leans back a little and waits. A part of her wants to hold him, wants to tell him that it's okay, but she feels like he needs this. He needs to show her his raw vulnerability, because he hates for there to be anything less than honesty between them.

It's one of the many things she's come to love about him.

A brief moment of silence comes to pass until Jonathan is composed enough to speak. "Well, since we're being honest," he begins with a sigh, offering her a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. "I feel the same way."

She studies his face for a moment. She knows in her heart that the confession is genuine, that he truly does care about her a lot, but she also knows that there is a lot that he is leaving unspoken. He hasn't figured out a way to love himself yet, and maybe that means he's not ready for her.

Yet.

But it's fine. Of course it is.

She reaches out for his hand and takes it in hers, squeezing ever so gently. He stares down at their hands, slowly lifts his head again. He speaks in a familiar whisper. "I don't know if I can be what you deserve. I don't- I don't know how to give you that."

You're already what I need.

There's a first time for everything. You can learn.

You're so much better than you give yourself credit for.

There are so many sentences that begin to form in her mind, things she wants to say to him (maybe even yell at him, as she grasps his shoulders and shakes him wildly), but she finds her mouth snapping shut and her eyes only looking at him with something that she hopes to be nothing but empathy.

"Maybe the timing's not right yet," he contemplates. "but maybe this can be something one day. All I know is that you're right. If you ever feel sad, I would do anything in my power to make it better. Even if I didn't really know how." He chuckles half-heartedly in an attempt to lighten the mood.

"I'm just glad it's out there. We're being honest to each other." She replies softly.

He nods his head, looking a little sad. She knows he wishes he could feel like he could be anything to her.

He already is, but it probably wouldn't work out until the day he realizes this himself.

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Their first kiss doesn't come a year after Jonathan decides to start working on himself. It doesn't come until two years after that. Not even three.

Fifteen years pass and both Nancy and Jonathan have created lives apart from each other, all including an array of potential romances that eventually failed despite their best efforts.

By the time they meet again for the first time in three years, as fate would have it, they are both single. Jonathan is still considered to be a low-income household and works freelance as a photographer for the local newspaper. But he gets by, makes enough money to put food on the table and a roof over his head. He's...relatively happy.

Nancy fares better than him financially, though she has to admit that part of that success was due to her father's connections. But emotionally, she hasn't had a partner who's receptive to her needs in years and it made her feel terribly lonely. She breaks it off with Thomas (who was about to propose- she shudders at the thought of a marriage with him) in the summer of 1999 and temporarily moves back to Hawkins in the fall, where her parents still reside.

Joyce Byers is still there as well, but she's surprised nonetheless when Nancy goes to visit Joyce and in walks Jonathan, from his old room (it momentarily takes her back to their teenage days). Obviously he's older now, his hair is cut slightly shorter, the lines on his face are a bit deeper and when his shoulders tense at the sight of her, she can't help but notice his muscles are now more defined.

"Nancy." He breathes, frozen in place, looking shocked.

She doesn't respond. Instead, she simply looks at him from across the room with the same intensity as him.

Joyce, feeling like she's standing in the crossfire, lets out an awkward chuckle, says something about leaving until she does and it's finally just the two of them.

They haven't seen each other in years and she doesn't know whether to hug him or apologize to him because there was no real excuse to basically cut him out of her life like that.

Fortunately though, he makes that decision for her this time as he crosses over (and basically kicks over the furniture in the process) and envelops her in the warmest hug she's had in years. It's a token of

just how far he's come since the last time she's seen him, and she feels grateful that he's now comfortable enough with her to make a spur of the moment choice like this.

"I've missed you." He murmured, his voice slightly muffled because he's holding her so close that his face is basically buried in the nape of her neck.

Her hands rub circles on his back. "I've missed you too."

It comes out sadder than she expected.

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"They found their way back to each other."

Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers are back in town, at the same time, and they have seen each other, and so it incites the familiar hearsay across town. Truly the peril of living in a small, closely knit town such as Hawkins.

But this time it's different.

This time they're all grown up, and it seems like at long last, the timing is right. Jonathan ends up asking her if she has a night to spare for him. He doesn't explicitly use the word 'date', but when she inquires, he asks if it's okay and she says with a smile, "it is." So they turn it into a date. A first, official date.

It's a simple date in every sense of the word, because Jonathan admits he still can't afford to put the stars in the sky for her, but he buys her flowers and holds her hand, and it's more than enough for her.

They're cheap flowers that will certainly wither after seven days, but the intention is so pure it still makes her heart flutter. When he links his hand with hers, it feels like such an intimate, but right thing to do and all she wants to do is live in this moment forever.

They arrive back at her parents' house, and before they're close enough to be spied on, Jonathan stops and turns to her. She kind of feels like a teenager again, seeing him looking all jittery like this. But

uncertainty squeezes at her chest just as much as it does for him, and she simply stares at him, clutching the bouquet of flowers in her hand, anticipating his next move.

She notices how his hand moves up until he places it on the side of her face, and she feels how they both shiver at the touch. He leans in slowly, giving her enough time to think about what's about to happen, so she can back out if she wants to. She doesn't.

He's still inching closer to her until she can feel his breath on her lips, and she wants to scold him for moving at such an insufferably slow pace. But she also kind of understands, because she herself feels like her feet are stuck on the ground and she momentarily forgot how to move.

The final inch of space that separates them finally closes as he places his lips over hers. It's soft and it's sweet, his lips are a little chapped from the cold and he tastes like the coffee he had after dinner but it's all him. Her stomach twists and turns and she thinks that if her heart were to beat any wilder, it could potentially burst from out of her chest and render him unconscious.

The tenderness of his kiss is unsurprising, and for a while, they're just getting comfortable with each other. Sometimes they need to pull away from each other to breathe, but they make sure to keep their foreheads touching, to still be close enough to enjoy the moment.

She takes the opportunity to press a few quick kisses to his lips herself, which gives him the certainty that she wants this just as much as he does.

It's like she has a front row seat as she watches him blossom into the Jonathan Byers he's kept hidden from her all these years: the man who loves her so deeply, the man who craves her body just as much as he adores her general existence and wants to uplift her to the highest heavens. There's passion inside of him just as much as there is tender love, and it's something she desperately wants to explore.

But not tonight.

Not when all that separates her from her ask-way-too-many-questions

mother is a few steps and a door, but as she pulls away from him and offers him her brightest smile, she makes a mental note that she's not going to let him – them – wait long.

"Not tonight." She speaks in a hushed voice and he nods his head in understanding.

"We need to do this right." He responds.

At that moment, she thinks that she's going to sleep with him in maybe the next few days, once they figure out where to get some privacy and the mood is right again. She thinks she's going to sleep with him for the first time, and she expects it to feel a little awkward at first, until it develops into something more familiar, like how having sex with someone who knows you inside and out would be. Someone you really love, and someone who really loves you. And equal amount of give and take.

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She doesn't expect to hear from her employer that she's been transferred to another state, but it happens the very next day. And she steps on the brakes. Hard.

She tells him, "I can't fall in love with you if I have to say goodbye to you again. I already have, but I can't let myself fall any deeper in love with you." Tears sting painfully in the corners of her eyes until they blur her vision and she hates herself from hurting him like this again.

He's trying really hard to look like it doesn't bother him, but through her tears, she can still see his trembling lips, his hands itching to move to his mouth so he can bite his nails, that tick he has whenever he feels extremely anxious. "It's fine." His words come out in a ragged, tired huff, but despite that, she knows that he doesn't blame her. He's just struggling with the fact that he has to deal with her leaving again. "I understand. This distance between us...it wouldn't work."

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She still has few days in Hawkins left, and while Jonathan has taken

some time in solitude to process it all, he doesn't end up pushing her away from him. Her imminent departure still looms over them as they interact and try to move forwards as friends, and they don't talk about it at all. They talk about all other kinds of stuff. She expresses interest in his photography and he asks her about her family. For a while, it works, dancing around the elephant in the room like this.

But after her third restless night, the thought of Jonathan pressing kisses to her neck, her shoulders, her belly...all in her *dream*, she puts the puzzle pieces together and admits to herself that she doesn't only harbor profound love for him, but also, desire. She wants him, she *needs* him close to her.

And she'll be damned if she lets herself get away from him without at least letting him know that.

What shakes her to the core – and, admittedly, kind of excites her – is that he agrees to her clumsy proposition of attempting a friends-with-benefits arrangement.

Author's Note:

Look at me trying my hand at this whole "friends with benefits" AU.